Building the Inclusive Academy from the Outside In

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Recently, a team of scholars from the American Council on Education (ACE) and from the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the University of Southern California have been interviewing institutional leadership teams across the country, including ours at Rutgers-Newark, to understand how to make "equity everyone's work." Among the many insights in their report is the notion that we in higher education need to go beyond "random acts of equity," taking a more systemic lens on our institutions.[2] And that is what I want to focus on today—what does a systemic lens on equity look like for higher education.

Now, from my perspective, this implies that we need to identify and dismantle policies and practices that prevent, from the outset, the likelihood of equitable outcomes. We also need to embed equity squarely in the center of our mission, and empower faculty and staff (and students and community partners) across the institution to work together in what these researchers call a **shared equity leadership model**, rather than either waiting for a top-down pronouncement or thinking of DEI as the responsibility of only one office, even as leadership voices may be necessary but not sufficient to this task.

Now, clearly, there are many ways to instantiate this kind of shared equity model, but I start with what I call an **outside-in approach**. This is because I firmly believe that higher education must genuinely reconnect to and engage with the world beyond our universities and our disciplinary networks in the service of public trust and the public good. We need to take an outside-in perspective on who we are and what we do and ask the following question: "what does the public need from higher education?" This is how we organized our 2014-15 Rutgers-Newark strategic planning exercise and I think it proved very valuable as a starting point.

This outside-in approach requires taking an equity lens on everything we do. We need to recognize and dismantle the architecture of segregation that has systematically marginalized specific groups over the long trail of history. We need to pursue not just equal treatment or equal access now, but equity that recognizes that history has meant that we all start in different places, and that it is not sufficient to simply say, ok, anyone is now welcome and our practices are now non-discriminatory.

We in higher education have to start by recognizing that for too long we have been satisfied with too many people left on the sidelines of opportunity, not by chance but by our very own practices, as Tony Carnevale and his colleagues assert in their recent book—*The Merit Myth: How our Colleges Favor the Rich and Divide America*.[3] Now they are specifically referring to

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[1] Remarks given at the Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences Faculty Development Symposium titled, Developing and Empowering Diverse Communities in Higher Education, held virtually on June 21, 2021.

[2] Adrianna Kezar, Elizabeth Holcombe, Darsella Vigil, & Jude Paul Matias Dizon, *Shared Equity Leadership: Making Equity Everyone's Work*, March, 2020.

[3] Anthony P. Carnevale, Peter Schmidt, and Jeff Strohl, *The Merit Myth: How our Colleges Favor the Rich and Divide America,* The New Press, 2020.

college admissions, but I will argue here that it extends to who else sits at our tables—faculty, staff, community, and so on—as well as whose voices we empower and weave into our scholarship and what kinds of scholarly work we reward.

Here, I like to draw on our own colleague Nancy DiTomaso's scholarship on diversity in the business world. She makes a distinction in hiring practices between biases against and biases for particular groups, pointing to the pernicious but often less obvious practices of hoarding opportunity for one's familiar group. For example, how often do we share information about good openings with people who look like us? How often do we look for candidates in our typical networks—not recognizing that many groups aren't part of those social capital networks? This extends even more broadly, of course, to the kinds of scholarship we recognize and reward as "excellent," to the journals we value, to people whose opinions we rely on in evaluating scholars for promotion, and more.

As Nancy says, we may have gotten in check our biases against diverse candidates (or maybe not), but we don't show much assertiveness in operationalizing biases for them either.[4] We don't think expansively beyond our networks, our familiar outlets, and our norms of excellence, and so it is hard to argue that we are truly open to inclusive voices and expansive (shall we say innovative) work.

Similarly, in many admissions processes—from undergraduate to graduate and professional schools—we disadvantage certain groups simply by virtue of placing emphasis on aspects of background that are differentially available to them. As just one example, we over-emphasize standardized tests that we know are highly influenced by access to test preparation, and that rarely show much predictive validity anyway. This dooms us to miss a whole rich talent pool, especially now as the current wealth gap and segregation of schools by race and class explodes even further. If we don't recruit expansively, we can't claim equal access in an unequal society. Therefore, when we commit to taking an outside-in approach and to evaluating our practices, I see this as involving commitments to reparative as well as forward-looking justice.

This outside-in approach, acknowledging both reparative and forward-looking actions to building a diverse and inclusive academy, requires an openness to disciplinary and institutional transformation, and as such there are many choice points along the way. Fundamental to them all, of course, is the embrace of a very hard notion in the academy (and beyond) -- that is the recognition that diversity and excellence genuinely intersect; that diversity isn't an add on but one and the same as excellence. Therefore, I thought I would spend my time today unpacking some of those choice points, the answers to which together set a path, in my opinion, either toward or away from inclusive excellence.

Insiders with Outsider Voices/Values

I want to start with leadership, and specifically, with the openness of those with decision-making influence across an institution to cultural change, both in terms of norms and practices, but also aspirations. Here I make a distinction informed by the wisdom of one of my all-time sheroes,

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[4] Nancy DiTomaso, Racism and Discrimination versus Advantage and Favoritism: Bias for Versus Bias Against, *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 35 (2015), 57-77.

Anita Hill, in her 2002 New York Times opinion piece, titled: "Insider Women with Outsider Values."[5] Now, she happened to be talking about two women, whistle-blowers in fact (one in the Minneapolis FBI and another at Enron), who weren't afraid to let their "outsider values" guide their efforts at institutional transformation, at some considerable risk to their insider power.

As obvious as this may sound, I believe that everyday in our positions and institutions we are confronted with choices, small and large, that pit "getting ahead" against institutional transformation—or to say it another way, the pursuit of private gain or public good. And I point to Anita Hill's framing because these choices often pivot on whether you are prepared to "check your identity at the door" to assimilate to insider norms and practices and aspirations, or whether your "outsider values" keep speaking to you.

Now, I don't want to suggest, as is true for all the choice points I'll describe today, that this model of outsider values informing insider decisions and actions is in any way easy. This is especially true as the academy is one of the most traditional spaces, where everything from rankings to promotions to simple pats on the back or even to the likelihood that when you speak in a meeting your contribution will be recognized, operates off of a model of assimilation not push back; status quo not change. Which brings me to the critical question of how to survive and even thrive as an insider with outsider values.

Here, as a social psychologist, I turn to the lessons of my field on the value of critical mass, as opposed to solo status. When you are one of a few, you will always be subject to stereotype threat, both from the pressure to represent and the likelihood that others see you through that (often deficit) lens. This is the choice point we all face at some point or another as to whether to be the "exceptional child," fitting in and representing our group at a mostly or even predominantly homogenous table of "others," or to choose instead to find and create and argue for a more fully reset table of diversity.

This is why, for example, I prefer hiring programs that engage clusters of new voices at once, both creating critical mass and reaping what Scott Page calls the diversity bonus of many, different perspectives innovatively intersecting, rather than the lone outsider brought in while the rest of the table remains the same.[6] Not only will the work we do get better, as Page argues, but to the extent that a more expansive diversity allows us all to appreciate first hand as much within group variance as between group variance, then stereotypes begin to be dismantled as well.

Of course, valuing diversity (via critical mass) as much as we value homogeneity (via opportunity hoarding for those like us), as the late organizational theorist Katherine Phillips brilliantly reminded us, is both not easy and definitely not the academy's norm, all liberal views to the side.[7] Sorry, but I am constantly struck by how easily we in the academy come to assume that the same old tables are full of exceptional, albeit familiar, people. In this regard, I think back

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[5] Anita Hill, Insider Women with Outsider Values, *The New York Times*, June 6, 2022, A31.

[6] Scott Page, *The Diversity Bonus: How Great Teams Pay Off in the Knowledge Economy*, Princeton University Press, 2019.

[7] Katherine Phillips, Commentary: What is the Real Value of Diversity in Organizations? Questioning Our Assumptions, in *The Diversity Bonus: How Great Teams Pay Off in the Knowledge Economy*, Princeton University Press, 2019, pp.223-45.

on a comment that Sheila Widnall, former Secretary of the Air Force and MIT engineering professor, once made. While she was praising the National Academy for its efforts to welcome more women in its ranks, she noted with some irony that she would be happy when there are as many mediocre women in the Academy as men. Hear, hear!

Nonetheless, as someone who has experienced both being the "exceptional child" at some of those tables (by virtue of solo status not by standardized scores!) and the utter joy and inspiration of the amazingly diverse leadership team I now work with every day at Rutgers-Newark, it is certainly worth remembering that the more you surround yourself with insiders with outsider values, the more you will normalize the inclusive academy, not to mention increase your own daily mental health.

Expansive and Collaborative Talent Searches

Moving from leadership teams to all the teams in which we work (departments, labs, classrooms, community-based projects, and so on), it is amazing to me how frequently we face the choice point of building diverse critical mass or sticking with our typical exceptional child strategy. This is true in admissions, recruitment, promotions or just in the ways we give out everyday rewards. This is the choice point of pivoting to a more expansive, fulsome embrace of diverse talent in and of itself, seen as an asset on its own terms.

Accordingly, building many such diverse tables will depend on the willingness to expand our social capital networks, our usual sources of talent, thereby creating new ladders of opportunity versus reinforcing the same old, narrow ones. And this takes intentionality, because, as I said earlier, it is about reparative action that dismantles blockades to opportunity, as much as about just saying that we want now to be inclusive in our teams but we'll continue looking in the same old places for the same old insignias of achievement.

Having served in many capacities on committees at NSF focusing on diversity in STEM, I am both impatient with the standard line that there just isn't a pool of diverse talent to recruit, and struck by how much progress can be made if we just look expansively, beyond the usual places. For example, having been at the table when NSF started the ADVANCE grants to support women faculty in STEM, I know that it can be done. Similarly, NSF's LSAMP programs have built robust pipelines of underrepresented graduates in STEM. And by the way, my Rutgers-Newark colleague Alec Gates just reported to me that the GSLSAMP consortium that he has coordinated across NJ for the last 11 years, has seen a four-fold increase in underrepresented STEM graduates, from a baseline of 488 in 2008 to 1875 in 2020. Similarly, Barry Komisaruk, our faculty member in Psychology and PI for our Minority Biomedical Research Support Program grant from NIH/NIGMS since 1984, reports the awarding over that period of 88 doctorates to Rutgers-Newark students—so we have a good, rich pool of diverse talent to engage! In fact, each year Rutgers-Newark enrolls approximately 550 undergraduates who express an interest in pursuing a health-related career, with about 100-150 of them going on each year to apply to a professional graduate health program. And, if you haven't had the pleasure of interacting with our undergraduate Minority Association of Pre-Health Students (MAPS), with a membership of about 190 active students each year, I urge you to attend one of their yearly conferences or regular events—they are the talent pool to whom I would look to understand

through lived experience what health equity and the social determinants of health are all about in our world.

Of course, making progress in resetting our tables, takes creativity and persistence—isn't that what we supposedly excel at?—but also collective will and openness to collaboration—which we may have less of traditionally. As, Keivan Stassun, a colleague with whom I once served on NSF's CEOSE Committee, demonstrated, persistence and collaboration are the key to change. As an astrophysicist at Vanderbilt, he created a robust pipeline of diverse doctoral candidates in an otherwise lily-white field by teaming with Fisk University in a wildly successful pathway program. And he constantly reminded us that despite the penchant of academics, by tradition and in reverence for rankings, to do things by ourselves, real change comes with collective effort, not with a wish and a handshake, especially when we are dealing in a world where so much talent has been kept, by assertive will, on the sidelines of opportunity.

Rewarding Publicly-Engaged Scholarship

Speaking of relegating to the sidelines, or rather saving the precious seats at the big boys table for a narrow swath of talent, the academy is very good too at narrowing the field of prestige when it comes to topics and methods and outlets of scholarly worth. This penchant is reflected in our institutions, our funding agencies, our journals, and our disciplinary societies. I certainly see that in my field of social psychology, despite the urgency for expansive scholarship in the real world that can take on what the Kerner Commission described 50 plus years ago as "two societies, one black and one white, separate and unequal." Nonetheless, prestige in social psychology is still more swiftly associated with analyses of implicit bias demonstrated via neuroimaging or at least randomized control trials (which of course I fully endorse too) than with publicly-engaged action research in the tradition of Kurt Lewin, who brilliantly proclaimed many decades ago that the best way to understand something is to try to change it.

And, speaking perhaps a bit perilously out of my league, as much as it is very popular these days in your worlds to embrace theories of the social determinants of health, and while we have certainly traversed, thank goodness, beyond Ben Carson's dogma that "poverty is just a state of mind," I think we have a long way to go in fully embracing the messy but consequential world of action research in the public health arena—but I leave that to my friend, Perry, to elucidate today.

More directly to my point, though, I want to emphasize that just as we knee-jerk to an exceptionalism strategy of admissions and recruitment in the academy, when it comes to rewarding a broad range of publicly-engaged scholarship, we all too often fail to recognize its excellence. This is especially true when it is collaborative and cross-disciplinary and sometimes genuinely inclusive of an atypical set of researchers, even those from the community itself. We get stymied very easily in norms about independent as opposed to collaborative contributions— even though most of us have always done our work in teams—and so we look, when promoting and rewarding scholars, to be able to identify their singular, or shall I say, personal, contributions. We look to problems that can be solved—at least somewhat—and therefore published in standard journal pieces, even as most publicly-engaged research involves non-linear progression, sometimes coming closer to twenty steps back for every one step forward. In that

regard, we care more about what a researcher has "accomplished" than what they have tried to tackle. We turn to the same old small group of "experts" to evaluate our colleagues for tenure and promotion, often requiring many "arms-length reviewers," even when the scholar being evaluated is working in new territories where few have gone. This is especially perilous when a publicly-engaged scholar has worked with community-based collaborators, whose words are less valued by the establishment to begin with than are those from familiar "experts."

And, to round out what I will risk calling an exclusionary process, we rather automatically acclaim mainly those who bring in external grants, as important as those are to reward. Yet, at the same time, we almost never remind ourselves of how dismal the statistics are in terms of who routinely gets funded and who doesn't. We say that our grant review systems are now nonbiased, but we fail to recognize that they are rarely equitable in outcomes, and reflect instead a narrow view of what excellent work looks like and who is likely to do it. Once again, fairness involves understanding what it means to be expansive in our decision-making. It involves both a reparative understanding of how the deck has been stacked and for whom, and a concentration in the here and now on the value of the work to be evaluated. Moreover, I strongly feel that such an expansive approach does not sacrifice excellence; in fact it just broadens its definition, what it looks like, and who is likely to be good at it, and, as reviewers, who will see its potential impact most clearly.

Cult of the Expert versus a Community of Experts (with and without Pedigree)

Turning next to another choice point in building the inclusive academy from the outside-in, too much of what we do is to reify what Harry Boyte prophetically called the "cult of the expert,"[8] rather than deliberately engage what I like to call a "community of experts, with and without pedigree." There are many pieces of the cult of the expert that I believe do not serve us well, especially in tackling the wicked problems of our day, from climate change to unpacking pandemic variants to stemming the tide of infant mortality or changing the divisive politics of our time—choose your problem and your field, and I suspect this approach will not work well.

First, the cult of the expert is too often organized as if we were "detached explorers" venturing in to new territory, without having taken the time to develop on the ground a collaborative ecosystem, including substantial voices with lived experience in that community. We've all seen many examples of this detached approach, often reflecting a one-and-done exploration versus a sustained commitment. One of my favorite examples occurred during my time on NSF's CEOSE Committee. In a presentation on a big initiative to study the "new arctic," their team of scientists seemed surprised that several of us asked if they had worked with or even interviewed the local indigenous communities who had experienced the effects of climate change in the arctic over decades, first-hand. While they quickly embraced this participatory-action research approach, I doubt that its reach penetrated deeply thereafter into the curriculum in relevant universities, not to mention the reviews of study sections.

My point is not to be critical—or too critical anyway—but rather to note that the excellence of our research truly can be enhanced by unpacking our traditions. Yet, again, this will involve substantial commitments, even financial ones, as working with communities of "experts, with

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[8] Harry Boyte, *Civic Agency and the Cult of the Expert*, Dayton: Kettering Foundation, 2009.

and without pedigree," frequently means we have to stop hoarding grant opportunities for only our institution or lab or team, as real collaboration comes with a price. It also often means that we have less of what I call one-way control than is traditionally comfortable, as we operate on a two-way street of outside-inside feedback and collaboration. In other words, it is high time we learn to listen to and sometimes "give in" to others' expertise, be it coming from those living and working across sectors, across disciplines, inside and outside the academy, not to mention the new generation of voices that we better accord a more central place in our top-down, all too narrowly elitist worlds. It is not too late for all of us to interrogate and then widen the scope of who we think has something to say to us. This is certainly our goal at Rutgers-Newark as we grow fully in to what it means to be an anchor institution, not just located in, but genuinely and productively, of Newark. How in the world can we contribute meaningfully to equitable growth and opportunity in our city, if we are not broadly defining who "we" are as an institution?

Whose Responsibility is it to Build that Inclusive Academy?

The mandate of broadly defining who we are as an institution brings me to a final point about organizational structure and who has responsibility in the academy for this task. Here, then, I come back to where I began today, and that is with the notion of shared equity leadership, as contrasted with the more typical siloed management systems we proliferate. Who is it that will keep equity goals front and center? Who will remind us at every turn that just because a candidate for admission or a possible recruit for a faculty or staff position or a colleague up for promotion doesn't come from the typical places or present with the typical record or isn't known by all the usual "experts" (or should I say suspects), they may well contribute to our excellence? How will we more deliberately construct the kinds of ecosystems for publicly-engaged, community-collaborative anchor institution research and action? Are we ready to give over these tasks only to the admissions committee or the faculty search committee or the promotion and review committee or the designated experts, even as good as they may be? And will we depend only upon the organizationally designated leader to set the aspirations of and make the strategic decisions for the institution, even if thankfully that person may well embrace these equity goals?

Clearly, you can predict that my answer is a resounding no. If we are to create an inclusive academy from the outside-in, we need to stop hoarding power and place, make everyone responsible for our equity goals, and most importantly make sure they are enacted across the board, in every place and space and activity we prioritize. I like to say that we need a proliferation of "third spaces," of collaboration—not owned by me or you but by us both. In the case of the academy this means, often, that we have to push ourselves to cross disciplines, units, roles, expertise, geographies, generations. We have to enlist a very broad range of change agents, across leaders, across faculty, across staff, across students, and most critically, across communities in and outside our universities. It is, at the beginning and the end of the day, up to us together, collectively, to both look backward and repair and look forward and grow.